

Minutes of SSAC Meeting, 7 March 2024
09.30-13.30
Virtual - MS Teams

Attendees:

Name	Position
Professor Julian Jones	SSAC Chair
Professor Julie Fitzpatrick	Chief Scientific Adviser for Scotland (<i>ex-officio member</i>)
Professor Dame Anna Dominiczak	Chief Scientist (Health) (<i>ex-officio member</i>) (<i>Agenda Items 1-3</i>)
Professor Louise Horsfall	SSAC Member
Professor Martyn Pickersgill	SSAC Member
Professor Melanie Simms	SSAC Member
Professor Nick Owens	SSAC Member
Dr Graham Kerr	SSAC Member
Dr Connor Blair	SSAC Associate
Professor Tahseen Jafry	SSAC Co-opted Member
Dr Suresh Kumar	Deputy Director, Industrial Transformation and Office of the Chief Scientific Adviser (SG) – (<i>Agenda Items 2-4</i>)
David Mallon	Head of Policy and Implementation Unit, Climate Change Division, Scottish Government (SG) - (<i>Agenda Item 6</i>)
Stephen O'Neill	Deputy Director, Entrepreneurship (SG)(<i>Agenda Item 8</i>)
Joanne Ward	Head of Science Advice and Engagement Team (SG)
Christine Lawson	SSAC Secretariat, Science Advice and Engagement Team (SG)
Caroline Murray	SSAC Secretariat, Science Advice and Engagement Team (SG)
Stephanie Cymber	Science Advice and Engagement Team (SG) Observer

1. Welcome and actions from last meeting.

Apologies:

Professor Mat Williams (CSA Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture)
 Professor Linda Bauld (Chief Social Policy Adviser)
 Professor Lisa Boden
 Professor Murray Roberts
 Dr Catherine Elliot
 Dr Kate Donovan
 Dr Mariana Garcia-Criado
 Dr Rhona McDonald (Strategic Lead, Science and Research, SG)

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and advised that Professor Bruce Whitelaw has resigned from the council. The Chair has written to him and thanked him for his contribution to the work of the council during his time.
- 1.2 The minutes of the last meeting were agreed, published online and the link circulated with meeting papers.
- 1.3 Actions from previous meeting completed. Professor Simms agreed to lead on the previous 'social media' action previously led by Professor Whitelaw.
- 1.4 The Chair noted the action on sustainable feedstocks was closed. The CSA (ENRA) had reported that although a useful project, there was no requirement for this at the moment.
- 1.5 Remaining action on an SSAC response to the Heat in Buildings consultation to be discussed under Item 7.
- 1.6 The Chair advised that an agreed change to the format of ex-officio updates had been agreed with one hot topic being highlighted going forward.

2. Ex-officio Hot Topic Discussion

2.1 Chief Scientist (Health) – Professor Dominiczak

- CS (Health) announced the new Cabinet Secretary for Health, Mr Neil Gray, is very positive about research and innovation, with a renewed push to work with industry and business. She also reported that Scotland's strong life sciences sector wants to see innovation directly impacting improvement to Scotland's NHS. SSAC members could potentially help through their networks, in terms of this and connected issues in the health space; and could potentially help policy officials regarding strategic future plans.

Action 32/1 – Secretariat to arrange a meeting between Chair / CS (Health) / Dr Blair to develop a specific proposal for this work and identify stakeholders and interested parties.

2.2 Chief Scientific Adviser for Scotland – Professor Fitzpatrick

- CSA advised that Ms Mairi McAllan has been appointed as Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Net Zero and Energy.
- The UK Government's Science and Technology framework cites five critical technologies, and the CSA noted that engineering biology was a particular strength in Scotland. It was considered important that Scotland takes a view on this technology and how the developing framework will be relevant for Scotland.
- There was discussion on how this links with the Innovation Strategy and the National Risk Register, suggesting there was a need for specific areas to be identified where SSAC have the competence to influence.

2.3 The Chair advised that **Professor Bauld** (Chief Social Policy Adviser) had provided a very useful update highlighting topics that could be included for discussion at a future SSAC meeting. This will be circulated with the note of the meeting.

3. Future Projects discussion

Offshore wind – Professor Owens

- In the absence of Professors Roberts and Donovan, Professor Owens referred to a field trip organised by the Marine Directorate that he and the CSA, with other colleagues, recently attended in Orkney to look at and discuss floating offshore wind initiatives. There are enormous financial opportunities in addition to environmental and social challenges, suggesting there is scope for SSAC to be involved in this area if a suitable project could be developed that combined relevant issues and SSAC competence.

Action 32/2 – Professor Owens / Dr Kerr to have initial discussion on an Offshore Wind project with the subgroup members.

Engineering Biology – CSA / CS (Health)

- CSA advised that Engineering Biology was one of the five critical technologies identified by UKG and has impact in a number of broad areas including health, marine, and environment so any SSAC future project on Engineering Biology could have these areas in scope.
- It was noted that Scotland has some key strengths in EB, including academic hubs and investment, meaning it is important that Scotland is able to contribute to UK-wide initiatives in this area.

Action 32/3 – Professor Horsfall to begin a mapping exercise of what currently exists in the engineering biology field in Scotland.

Action 32/4 – Chair / CSA & CS (Health) to meet Professor Horsfall to before next SSAC meeting to discuss the engineering biology approach.

AI/Emerging technologies – CSA/CS (Health)

- CS (Health) noted the importance for AI machine learning in Health. She noted the developments in the industry in addition to those in universities / NHS / other public bodies.
- CSA noted a [Scottish AI Alliance](#) conference on 28 March taking place at Dynamic Earth, Edinburgh.
- The need to continue to be aware of the impact of critical technologies was recognised, as was the need to co-opt members with relevant expertise to assist with any critical technologies project.

Action 32/5 – Secretariat to arrange follow up meeting with critical technologies SG policy colleagues to include Chair and Dr Kerr to refine scope of any project.

Action 32/6 – Secretariat to arrange meeting with CS (Health), and Professors Bauld and Pickersgill to cover population health (including future pandemics, prevention of disease, and chronic ill-health) and to include the topic on the next meeting’s Agenda.

4. Members’ Updates

4.1 Discussion included new activity launched for entrepreneurial academics, member appointment to research council bodies, SFC support for Innovation Centres, and issues connected to the EU Horizon programme.

5. Scottish Government Updates

5.1 The Head of Science Advice and Engagement, provided an update on behalf of Dr Suresh Kumar, advising of the recent Cabinet changes and the Scottish budget announcement [2024-25 Scottish Budget](#). Other items brought to the attention of the SSAC included the National Innovation Strategy, funding for university research, the SG’s [International Education Strategy](#), and the Scottish Affairs Committee’s inquiry into Scottish science, for which the CSA and the Minister for Higher and Further Education, Graeme Dey, had recently given evidence.

6. Standing Agenda Item – Climate Change – David Mallon, Climate Change Division, Scottish Government

6.1 It was noted the SSAC Adaptation report, published in November 2023, had been useful and was now actively feeding into policy development. It also helped inform the development of the draft Scottish National Adaptation Plan (SNAP).

6.2 The SNAP consultation was launched in January 2024 and closes on 24 April when responses will be assessed, allowing further feedback to be provided.

7. Update on Current Projects

SNAP Adaptation Consultation – Professor Jafry (see also Item 6 above)

- Professor Jafry provided an update on behalf of the SSAC SNAP project workgroup. The next step will be to have an in-person roundtable of approx. twelve stakeholders across five key areas.
- The date of the roundtable is expected to take place week commencing 15 April with the agreed Terms of Reference (TOR) being circulated to SSAC as soon as possible.
- The specific questions will then be agreed with Climate Change Division to agree and identify a mix of stakeholders for the event.

Action 32/7 – Professor Jafry and Dr Donovan, with advice from Climate Change Division, to finalise the SNAP project TOR for circulation to SSAC for comment.

Space Sector – Dr Kerr

- An update of the SSAC Space Sector project was provided, noting the roundtable had been well attended. Literature reviews and desk research had been completed.
- The next stage is to analyse the questionnaire feedback and roundtable discussion notes to inform the report and identify key themes.
- An initial draft of the main report has been shared with the working group. An updated version will be shared with SSAC for comment / signoff in the next few weeks.

Heat in Buildings Consultation – Chair

- A written response from SSAC, considering whether the technology is in place to meet the legislative, infrastructure and skills targets, would be submitted by the agreed extended deadline of 12 March.

Action 32/8 – Secretariat to circulate link to Heat in Buildings consultation to request volunteer to co-ordinate a brief response.

8. Stephen O’Neill, Deputy Director, Entrepreneurship – update on entrepreneurial campuses

8.1 Stephen O’Neill provided a short presentation on the SG’s Innovation Strategy and the progress being made in Entrepreneurial campuses commenting that he would welcome SSAC advice and/or expert input in this area. There was a short discussion on university spinouts, social enterprise spinouts, and how academics (including early career researchers) could be supported in their aims to be ‘more entrepreneurial’.

8.2 The Chair thanked Stephen for his presentation and suggested he consider next steps and return to SSAC/report back to Secretariat with an update at a future meeting.

Action 32/9 – Secretariat to liaise with Stephen O’Neill to consider next steps and provide an update at a future SSAC meeting.

9. AOB

9.1 The Chair advised that Dr Rhona McDonald was leaving her current SG post and wished her well in her new appointment and expressed thanks for her input and support of the SSAC.

9.2 The date of the next meeting is the morning of 6 June 2024 in person.

Summary of Actions

Action	Item	Lead	To be completed by	Update
28/5	To arrange meeting with associate members and other SSAC volunteers to take forward discussions on SSAC social media.	Professor Simms	6 June 2024	
31/3	SSAC to respond to Heat and Buildings consultation by 12 March 2024.	All / Secretariat to share link to consultation once published.	12 March 2024	Completed
31/4	Discussion on offshore wind /Just Transition and format of reports	Professor Roberts/ Dr Donovan	Completed	Verbal update at March meeting
32/1	Secretariat to arrange a meeting between Chair / CS (Health) / Dr Blair to develop a specific proposal for this work on Clinical Trials and identify stakeholders and interested parties.	Secretariat	By June meeting	
32/2	Professor Owens / Dr Kerr to have initial discussion on an Offshore Wind project with the subgroup members.	Professor Owen / Dr Kerr	By June meeting	Meeting arranged for 7 May
32/3	Professor Horsfall to begin mapping exercise of what currently exists in the engineering biology field in Scotland.	Professor Horsfall	By June meeting	Completed
32/4	Chair / CSA & CS(Health) to meet with Professor Horsfall before next SSAC meeting to discuss the engineering biology approach.	Secretariat	By June meeting	

32/5	Secretariat to arrange follow up meeting with critical technologies SG policy colleagues (Scott McLelland) to include Chair and Dr Kerr to refine scope of any project.	Secretariat	By May 2024	Meeting held 20 March
32/6	Secretariat to arrange meeting with CS (Health), Professors Bauld and Pickersgill and to include population health on the next Agenda.	Secretariat	By June meeting	
32/7	Professor Jafry and Dr Donovan, with advice from Climate Change Division, to finalise the SNAP TOR for circulation to SSAC for comment.	Professor Jafry / Dr Donovan	8 April 2024	Completed
32/8	Secretariat to circulate link to Heat in Buildings consultation to request volunteer to provide a brief response.	Secretariat	18 March 2024	Completed
32/9	Secretariat to liaise with Stephen O'Neill to consider next steps and provide an update at a future SSAC meeting.	Secretariat		